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6th Annual "CougsFirst!" Event to showcase 120 businesses with "deals galore"

SEATTLE, Washington (January 17, 2018) -- CougsFirst!, a unique affinity marketing and networking event, will hold its sixth annual show on **March 8** with a new title sponsor, a keynote address by Washington State University President Kirk Schulz, a human resource panel, and a showcase of exhibitors offering an array of "deals, discounts, and giveaways."

BECU is the new show sponsor for the free-to-attend event, which will be held at the Washington State Convention Center from **4 PM to 8 PM** followed by an After Party with entertainment, refreshments and a no-host bar. Both the show and party are open to all, regardless of any ties to WSU.

BECU and CougsFirst! are also sponsoring a Business Roundtable on March 7 at the Washington State Convention Center and the [Spokane Inaugural CougsFirst! Show](#), which will be held on April 19 at The Davenport Grand Hotel.

"[CougsFirst!](#) was established to connect WSU's loyal alumni and friends in the business arena," said Glenn Osterhout, board chairman and one of the organization's founders. "Our combination of special events, social media and advertising provides a network for connecting and interacting in a positive environment," he explained.

Various sponsorship options are offered, but Osterhout said they're selling at a faster pace than previous years due mostly to a high percentage of returning exhibitors.

The [Crimson Sponsorship](#), which includes 8'x10' booth space and other benefits, is available to businesses that are owned, managed and affiliated with WSU. Alternatively, for non-exhibitors, a [Gray Sponsorship](#) features business listings in the CougsFirst directory, recognition in the show program and marketing options provided by CougsFirst!. All other sponsorship packages are sold out. More information on sponsorships and the show can be found at cougsfirst.org.

Exhibitors represent a wide array of businesses, from apparel, breweries and wineries to professional services, car dealers, home improvement contractors, resort getaways, sports teams, and other categories. Several WSU Colleges are also exhibiting.

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CougsFirst! is a business network that encourages Washington State University alumni and friends to Think CougsFirst! for products and services.

Upon attending his first CougsFirst! Show last year, Kirk Schulz, who became WSU's 11th president in mid-2016, said he had never experienced anything quite like it. "It is truly a unique event," he remarked. Dr. Schulz will deliver a keynote address at 3 p.m. at the Convention Center just prior to the show and the WSU Executive team including President Schulz will have a booth at the show to meet WSU alumni and friends.

Businesses showcase merchandise and services, but also report the show is an effective way to recruit new employees, expand into new markets, promote special events, and build long-term relationships. "It's a fun and productive way to conduct business and benefit from year-round exposure," proclaimed Brian Quint, president of Aqua Quip.

Another multi-year sponsor, H.S. Wright III, chair and founder of Seattle Hospitality Group, said the biggest benefit to his company has been the talent they've been able to hire, saying "Cougs have been among the best performers and most loyal employees we've found." He also enjoys having fun at the event, saying "You feel like you're at a giant Cougar reunion party!"

Show organizers emphasize CougsFirst! is more than a one-day event. Depending on the level of sponsorship, participants benefit from the website directory, year-round recognition on various social media platforms, and invitations to special events.

"Think Cougs First! is simple and straightforward – and very intentional," explained board member Jack Thompson, one of the founders. He said he proposed the idea after attending one of his son's games at the Los Angeles Coliseum when he saw a display of vendors. The former WSU quarterback known as the "Throwin' Samoan" knew WSU's loyal alumni would embrace the concept.

Upwards of 2,500 WSU alumni and friends are expected at the March 8 event, making it one of the top 20 regional trade shows in the Puget Sound area after just five years. Although admission to both the show and after-party is free, organizers recommend **pre-registering** to avoid lines at check-in.

CougsFirst!, unlike some collegiate networking groups, operates as a standalone organization, but maintains close ties to the university. The CougsFirst! trademark is owned and protected by Washington State University.

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